

To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
where in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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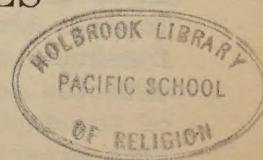
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LAND POLICIES IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND THE CHURCH'S CONCERN

By David E. Lindstrom*



Land policy and land reform are of paramount importance in our world. More than two-thirds of the people live on the land. Half the world's people have less than 2,250 calories of food per day. Over ninety per cent of these people live under conditions that caused a yearly death rate three times as high as the 1947 rate in the United States. (1) Hunger for food and for land has grown to great proportions. "The failure of the Nationalist government (in China) to inaugurate a program of land reform for the mass of its citizens since its rise to power in 1927 has undoubtedly contributed to its recent downfall." (2)

According to the chairman of the Food and Agriculture Organization's executive committee, the undernourished reproduce faster than the well-fed. Nature operates with only one goal--survival. Hunger "is not an inevitable part of nature's plan--the earth can support the entire human race--even if the present population triples in health and vigor. The disease and misuse of land is man's doing, not nature's. Hunger comes from flaws in the social and economic structure created by the human race in becoming 'civilized.' Only by raising the buying and consuming capacity of the undernourished two-thirds of the world can the other third survive and prosper. Hungry people lack the will and energy to run their own affairs, to safeguard their freedom. Such people, unwilling or unable to fight dictatorial leadership, fall easy prey to totalitarianism. And food is a cheaper, surer, and far more humane prevention for such a situation than war is a cure." (3)

"A successful policy for aiding an undeveloped country is the one which confers the greatest benefit on the greatest number of people in the country--the peasant. A policy of development which tends to support or even tolerate the vested interests of landlordism, or is allied with it, is bound to result in an ultimate defeat of defense against Communist imperialism in underdeveloped countries." (4)

* A paper read before the Rural Pastors' Short Course, Farm and Home Week Program, Urbana, January 28, 1952. We are indebted to Dr. Lindstrom, who is Professor of Rural Sociology, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois.

Our early land policies and land reforms have encouraged family owner-operated farms. The Homestead Act of 1862 and similar acts were designed to get the public lands into the hands of farm families as quickly as possible and aid materially in establishing the family farm in this country. Salter has pointed out that when our founding fathers set up our land system "the world was almost entirely in the grasp of a feudalistic land tenure system." (5) We wanted to escape that in this country.

But before that, other countries had struggled with the problem. In Denmark, during the period 1660-1788, the holders of big estates gradually became owners of about seventy-five per cent of the land, while the crown lands decreased to twenty per cent and the peasant freeholds to five per cent. The landlords, under these conditions, could safely exploit the peasants and workmen of the villages. But with the passage of a land enclosure law, a law making possible the formation of cooperative credit associations, and other land reforms, together with the peasant farmers' intense desire to own land, over ninety-four per cent of the approximately 200,000 Danish farmers now own and operate their farms. "The experiences regarding land tenure in Denmark during the last one hundred years have proved that occupying ownership is superior to tenancy." (6) Danish national policy is to preserve and nurture the family-owner-operated farm.

The Swedish experience is of equal significance. Rudolph Freund, formerly a research fellow of the Royal Academy of Agriculture, Stockholm, describes briefly the process of the dissolution of villages and the breakup of the open field systems so characteristic of European agriculture. (7) This process began with laws enacted in the 1780's but "the family farm, as a prototype of Swedish agriculture, is the product of fairly recent developments." The New Agriculture Reform, created in 1947, has as its primary motivating force to secure national self-sufficiency in food. (8) Recognizing the need for increased efficiency and that many farms are too small to measure up to the standard set for a family farm--twenty-five to fifty crop acres--yet the national policy-makers in Sweden have settled upon the family farm as the most desirable type of farm. They feel the nation will be best assured of an adequate food supply from farms operated as family farms. Hence, recent legislation is designed to encourage farms of twenty-five to fifty crop acres by gradually absorbing smaller ones as they become available. The sale of a farm to one who does not intend to become a farmer is forbidden by the Act of 1947. (9) Price policies are such as to: (1) assure family farmers an income similar to that of classes of workers in the city, and (2) to induce efficiency in production. The state has the power to remove farmers from the land who abuse it. This measure has had to be used very rarely. Loans with low interest rates can be secured to make farm improvements. One type of such loan can be written off when the improvements are satisfactorily completed. The state can buy up lands made available for sale by death or otherwise, divide them if necessary, and resell to present owners to increase their holdings to the desired family size. Farmers themselves have developed cooperatives through which the bulk of their products are sold; in the case of milk and its products this amounts to 98.5 per cent of all that is produced. (10) Swedish national policy is to encourage and nurture family-owner-operated farms.

The United States has found it expedient to move further in the formation of a national land policy in areas of military occupation than it has at home. C. Clyde Mitchell says of south Korea: "Land reform certainly is the first and probably the most important social reform. I was head of the National Land Association in 1946-48, managing 600,000 acres of the country's best farm lands.

Before I left in 1948, we Americans put over a land reform program which sold this land to the long-oppressed farm tenants at reasonable prices. The program was a success. It went a long way to strike at the human misery and dissatisfaction on which communism breeds. We won a cold-war battle from the Russians with the land sale in south Korea." (11)

In Japan the program went further. "At the end of World War II, tenants and part-tenants accounted for seventy per cent of the country's farm families. Landlords were required to sell to the government which, in turn, made the land available to farmers at reasonable prices. Where renting continued, landlords who had in the past often charged fifty to seventy-five per cent of the annual crops were restricted to cash rentals not exceeding twenty-five per cent of the value of the crops. (12) This land reform has resulted in establishing seventy per cent of the cultivators as operators, according to Hewes, land reform specialist under General MacArthur at Tokyo. (13) Less than six per cent are landless tenants, while the other twenty-four per cent own some land. Communist promises of 'land to the landless' do not entice farmers any more." (14)

Agrarian reforms in Japan, according to Arthur Raper, including the land reform program, the establishment of new cooperatives, and the land reclamation program--were the cause of most of the important changes that took place in thirteen villages from June 1947 to December 1948. (15) Of these, the most important was the transfer of land to operating tenants whereby nearly all lands purchased through village land commissions were resold to families who were tenantry them. But every possible safeguard must be used if these reforms are to be permanent and result in genuine social progress.

Similar reforms have taken place in Iran, where a 75,000-acre tract of newly-irrigated desert has been used for the resettlement of 1,200 peasant families. Each received 62.5 acres of land, to which they will have a clear title in ten years. In Mexico over seventy-five million acres of land have passed into the hands of the peasants as a result of the Mexican government's reform program. But "in Mexico as in Japan and other areas, a basic problem still exists: there simply is not enough land to provide all farmers with a decent standard of living." (16)

Contrast these movements with the Communist land policy and land reforms. Naum Jasny reports that land reform did play an important part in the first phase of the Russian Revolution. After centuries of serfdom the peasant became a free citizen with some land of his own. The landlord system was abolished. But the Communists used land reform to bolster their own program. When the peasants failed to cooperate and starvation threatened the cities, the Communists decided to abolish all private holdings. So all land and livestock, but not the home life of the members, have been collectivized. Each peasant could keep about an acre (less now) of land so long as he was loyal to his superiors. The result is a twenty per cent lower income for the peasants than before collectivization; peasants must work longer and harder; their purchasing power is less; and they are no longer their own masters. (17)

The Communist land reform formula, as reported by James O. Howard (18), is first to promise and actually parcel out land to peasants. The next step is to set up "cooperative" farms, really owned by the state and providing for pooling land, work stock, and tools. The third step is collectivization in which the farmer is no longer paid for his land, tools, and work stock; these become

the property of the state; he is paid only for his labor. This is the formula being carried out in Russian-occupied areas everywhere--eastern Germany, the Baltic States, other occupied European areas, China, and north Korea. In China and Korea, the land distributing process--step one--is still in process.

The motive back of the Communist plan is clear--to make man a vassal of the state. The ultimate result is complete loss of individual freedom and lower living levels among the masses. "The Communist regime of China, by playing on the hunger of the peasants for land and by giving them actual ownership, has apparently won their support and attained its objectives of political control, although it should be pointed out that land redistribution alone will never solve the age-long problems of China's agrarian poverty. Barring the possibility of most areas potentially cultivable in China, the program of land redivision of the Chinese Communist regime, with its attendant elimination of individual farm acreage, will tend to reduce the productivity per capita and thus further depress the standard of living of the peasantry." (19)

Motives for land reform are quite different in the Scandinavian countries and in the non-Communist world generally than in the Communist-dominated countries. In Denmark it is recognized that the farmer wants to be free to manage his farm as he pleases. Danes believe that owners and their families are more progressive, that ownership gives more stability and is more favorable to cooperation. (20) In Sweden it is believed "farmers should have a good standard of living. The farm providing the most satisfactory type of living, according to the thinking of Swedish policy-makers, is the family farm--a farm on which a family with little or no paid outside help can make a living comparable to the standard found in urban areas. It is the family farm, moreover, that is the most efficient production unit, for unpaid family labor makes it so. The family workers are more genuinely interested in the farm and its productive capacity than are workers hired to do farm work. The nation will be assured a more adequate food supply from farms operated as family farms. Swedish policy-makers are aware, moreover, that agriculture produces a rural culture of value to the whole of society. Interest in the home, in some processing and use of farm products in the home, in good schools attuned to rural needs, stable churches, and a local government able to meet local needs and administer national policies, partly on the basis of voluntary leadership--are elements that go to make up a modern rural culture." (21)

The basic philosophy back of our American farm policy, based on our desire to be completely free of feudal bonds, gave rise to the frontier concept of private property--natural rights by which man is free to acquire, sell, give away, or bequeath property. (22) Salter pointed out that, when we established the right of the individual to operate his land as he pleased, "we also established the right of money lenders to write mortgages with terms that can never be met. We gave the right to all to transfer land at prices which can only mean misery and poor living for the family who has to pay these prices. We gave the right to landlords to rent and farmers to lease land at prices which can only force impoverishment of both the soil and the farm family. We gave the right to people to treat the land like a bankbook--to draw not only on its annual income but also on the capital or asset value, as though the disappearance of a section of land were no different than the disappearance of a bankbook balance. Private ownership of a farm should not be used as the right to treat land titles as a commercial pawn." (23)

Fortunately, we in the United States have recognized other than purely

economic values in family farming. Thomas Jefferson said: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example." (24) Robert A. Rohwer has analyzed some of the values in family farming. Among the significant values which he lists for family farming are independence of self-employment and giving those employed in farming a sense of importance. Family farming, he asserts, must compete successfully with other values, and farmers as well as nonfarmers must value farming more than they prize competing values if family farming is not to be destroyed. (25)

The church has given voice to some of the basic values to be found in owner-operated farming that have helped to preserve and nurture it. Arrington points out the way in which the Mormons, for example, modified the absolute private property right concept. All members of the church were to "consecrate" or deed their property to the church, according to Joseph Smith's revelation. The earth and all properties on the earth are the Lord's; the people are not owners but stewards of their possessions. Property was to be used "for the glory of God and the relief of men's estate." The conception of property ownership as a life lease subject to beneficial use and social direction was the guiding principle of Mormonism up to the turn of the century.

"The increase of government intervention in this field since 1900 has rendered (the stewardship principle) unnecessary and superfluous. It was this philosophy--that individualism, private speculation, and covetousness will be avoided, and that all should act in the interest of all and for the welfare of the whole community--which made the institution of private property in early Utah unique and meritorious." (26) No doubt this philosophy is still a motivating force among Mormons today, for family farming and family life is still strong with them.

"Most of us still believe that the family-owned farm possessed by persons with a high degree of physical, mental, and moral worth is the cornerstone of civilization," stated Grace Frysinger in 1939. (27) The National Catholic Rural Life Conference declares: "Since man needs property to attain to the status of free men, to develop his personality, and to provide for his family, it follows that an economic system to be equitable must provide opportunity for the masses to become owners." (28) His Holiness, Pius XII, in an address before the International Catholic Congress in Rome in July 1951 said: "The majority of mankind lives on the land, either in isolated farms or in villages or market towns; these problems (of rural life) because of their indirect effects are of primary interest to the whole human race. The family-type farm...forms the nucleus of a healthy rural population...in close contact with nature, as God created and governs it. The worker in the field knows by daily experience that human life is in the hands of its author--no other working group is so suited as his to the life of the family, viewed as a spiritual, economic, and juridical unit, and also in the matter of production and consumption. However hard this work may be, man finds himself still master of his world through action at the heart of the community--of the family, of the neighborhood, and also, secondarily, of various economic cooperatives, in all truth, and not merely as a matter of form, grounded on the responsibility of the entire membership." (29)

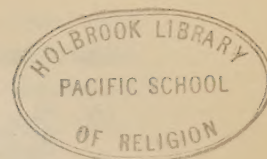
A large group of Protestant denominations have worked together for years

through the Town and Country Committee of the National Council of Churches. Recognizing that family farms have declined in number in the United States, especially in the last two decades, and that the best church community is the one with family farm units with stable farms of tenure, the Land Tenure Commission of the National Convocation of the Church in Town and Country recommended that "each denomination, through its rural life staff, initiate in rural churches in various sections of the country a program for establishing more family farms and, where feasible, to encourage the use of church funds for this purpose." (3) The National Lutheran Council, representing most Lutheran denominations of the country, now encourages local Lutheran churches to aid Lutheran young couples to get established on the land in Lutheran communities. The Jewish Agricultural Society was specifically organized to help Jewish people who wished to settle upon the land. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish rural leaders have set forth a statement of principles underlying a good national land policy: the use of land as a trust "to enable the possessor (a family-farm-owner-operator) to develop his personality, maintain a decent standard of living for his family, and fulfill his social obligation--to enrich the soil." (31)

Land policy formation and land reforms are of world-wide concern. "The countries most subject to political revolution and agrarian unrest are those having a strong landlord class on the one hand and a landless class on the other," according to I. W. Moomaw. "Most of the people among whom missionaries serve are in the throes of land reform," he declares. "The people are on the move, but this does not mean that they will necessarily move forward. The problems of land reform cannot wait; they will be solved in one way or another. What we see among the underprivileged peoples of the world today is in one sense not revolution. As they press their legitimate claims for land and a greater degree of social and economic justice, they are really asking for a place in the democratic household of free nations." (32)

Do we dare to make our domestic land policies consistent with those we accept for peoples in countries over which we have political or military control? Rohwer says that except for the Homestead Act of 1862 and the FHA (FSA originally) "many other possibilities, such as graduated land taxes and prohibition of corporate farming, have been tried little, if at all." (33) Salter questions whether freedom of land ownership will assure the right of freedom of people to work the land "to find economic opportunity and equality and security in holding this land. We need to work out devices that will protect our land and the people who work it from such destructive tendencies (as absentee landlordism, misery and poor living for people who work the land, impoverishment of the soil and the farm family, and to treat the land like a bankbook)." Can and should the government in this country develop national policies that will encourage family-owner-operated farming as has been done by governments in Sweden and Denmark and by our own government in Korea and Japan? Can we agree with church leaders that land reform is more than an economic problem, that it is a social, moral, and religious problem as well? If this is true, then we may agree with Moomaw that "our land use is to a large degree still geared to exploitative forms of rural development. While we have developed limited but rich experience in family-type farming and in bridging the land ownership gap between generations, we have yet to face squarely the nonmaterial values inherent in land use and the moral aspects of land renting, size of holding, and contracts for sale." If so, the church must train a leadership that can point the way; neither government nor any other organization can build the moral and spiritual base so necessary to nurturing free men on their own lands, who love the soil and recognize the true nature of their right to use it, as can the church and leaders trained by it.

This is the greatest situation here and in all parts of the world.



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